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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0943
INFO RHMFSS/18WG CP KADENA AB JA
RHMFSS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUSFNSG/CDR10THASG TORII STATION JA
RHMFSS/CG FIRST MAW
RUHBABA/CG III MEF CAMP COURTNEY JA
RUHBBEA/CG THIRD FSSG CAMP KINSER JA
RUHBABA/CG THIRD MARDIV
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFSS/COMFLEACT OKINAWA JA
RHMFSS/COMMARCORBASESJAPAN CAMP BUTLER JA
RHMFSS/COMMARFORPAC
RHHMHAA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI
RHOVVKG/COMSEVENTHFLT
RUHBVMA/CTF 76
RUYLBAA/DODSPECREP OKINAWA JA
RUESOK/FBIS OKINAWA JA
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0302
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 1003
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFSS/NAVCRIMINVSERVRA OKINAWA JA
RUHBANB/OKINAWA AREA FLD OFC US FORCES JAPAN CAMP BUTLER JA
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 0378
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 0328
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0940
RUALBCC/YOKOTA AB HQ USFJ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAHA 000043

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/3/2033

TAGS: MARR MOPS PGOV PINS JA

SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVES MAY LOSE MAJORITY IN OKINAWA PREFECTURAL ASSEMBLY, BUT NO DIRECT IMPACT ON BASE REALIGNMENT PLAN EXPECTED

CLASSIFIED BY: Kevin K. Maher, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Naha, Japan, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Our local political contacts echo private media views that the balance of power in the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly (OPA) may shift from the conservatives to the opposition reformists in the upcoming June 8 election. Although most of the five parties who comprise the reformist grouping, as well as the local press, traditionally have a clear bias against the presence of US military bases on the island, in fact the US military presence has not been a major topic in this election. We expect that even if control of the OPA shifts to the reformists, this will have no direct impact on implementation of the agreed base realignment plans for Okinawa. Decisions on issuing the permits required for the Environmental Impact Assessment and the landfill construction for the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) will remain in the hands of the conservative Governor, with the Prefectural Assembly having no role to play in this process. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Our contacts at the local Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Okinawa headquarters have confirmed what our media contacts tell us, that the upcoming June 8 election is likely to result in a loss of conservative LDP/Komeito control of the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly, with majority control shifting to a coalition of the five "reformist" parties. At present, the conservatives hold 27 of 48 seats, the reformists 20, with one seat vacant. The LDP Okinawa headquarters told us June 2 its latest survey shows only 18 seats as safe for the conservatives, with 22 safe for the reformists. The LDP does not believe the conservatives can pick up seven of the remaining eight seats, which would be required to maintain majority control.

¶3. (C) The primary reason for the opposition's strength is a

recent change to Japan's medical system for the elderly, which now requires those seventy-five years and older to pay for their own national health insurance rather than piggyback upon the health coverage of their adult children. As in the rest of Japan, this has created an uproar in Okinawa and resentment against the LDP administration in Tokyo. Polls taken last week show this to be the primary issue of concern in this election for both voters and candidates. Those polls also show that the economy, the social welfare system, education, and jobs creation far outweigh base issues in the minds of the voters and candidates. In fact, some of the reformist parties did not even include the base presence in their list of issues on which they are campaigning. Redistricting also has hurt the LDP and Komeito in some of the urban areas. To a certain extent the election is being played up as a referendum on the Governor's popularity a year and a half into his term. This is not helping the conservatives, since the Governor has lost support even among conservatives for his inability to carry out campaign promises on such things as increasing tourism, creating more jobs and improving the welfare system. He has lost support of the critical construction industry because of his inability to implement his promise to postpone heavy fines on the industry imposed for previous bid rigging on Okinawa Prefectural Government funded construction projects.

¶4. (SBU) It also is important to note that despite the best efforts of the two local newspapers to make it so, this Prefectural Assembly election is not a referendum on the base realignment plan generally or on FRF specifically. The two papers ran editorials arguing that the election should be about FRF (note that the papers both argue Futenma should be moved outside of Okinawa, or simply closed, rather than relocated within the Prefecture). But given that surveys showed most of the electorate and the candidates themselves are not including

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base issues high on their lists of priorities, the papers were forced to admit that bread and butter issues are driving this election. We do expect, however, that if the reformists do gain a majority in the Assembly, then the newspapers will do their best to make it appear that base issues were the root cause of any reformist victory in order to justify their continued anti-base editorial bias.

¶5. (C) Even if the reformists do gain control of the OPA in the June 8 election, our assessment is that this will not have a major impact on implementation of the DPRI base realignment plans agreed for Okinawa. The OPA really has no role to play in implementation of those plans. The reformists may criticize the Governor for cooperating with the central government on implementation, but the OPA has no mechanism to control or influence the Governor's decisions on whether or not to issue the permits required for certain stages of the on-going Environmental Impact Assessment procedures, or his decision on whether to issue the required permit to begin land-fill construction. In short, the OPA has no role in the permitting process. That authority will continue to lie with the Governor.
MAHER